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ABSTRACT

The United Way of America has issued a Call to Action that asks the United States to make the achievement of literacy a top national priority. The goal is to achieve literacy by the year 2010. The Call to Action includes a set of strategies, objectives, and actions based on United Way's community problem-solving approach. At the heart of the Call to Action is a set of three national strategies: (1) create and sustain a national policy that makes literacy a national priority; (2) expand and ensure access to and coordination of available literacy education resources, and strengthen the capacity of the nation's literacy and education systems; and (3) support, encourage, and expand a community or collaborative approach to achieving literacy. For each of these strategies, projects and policies are suggested. Long-term and short-term goals are also stated. (KC)

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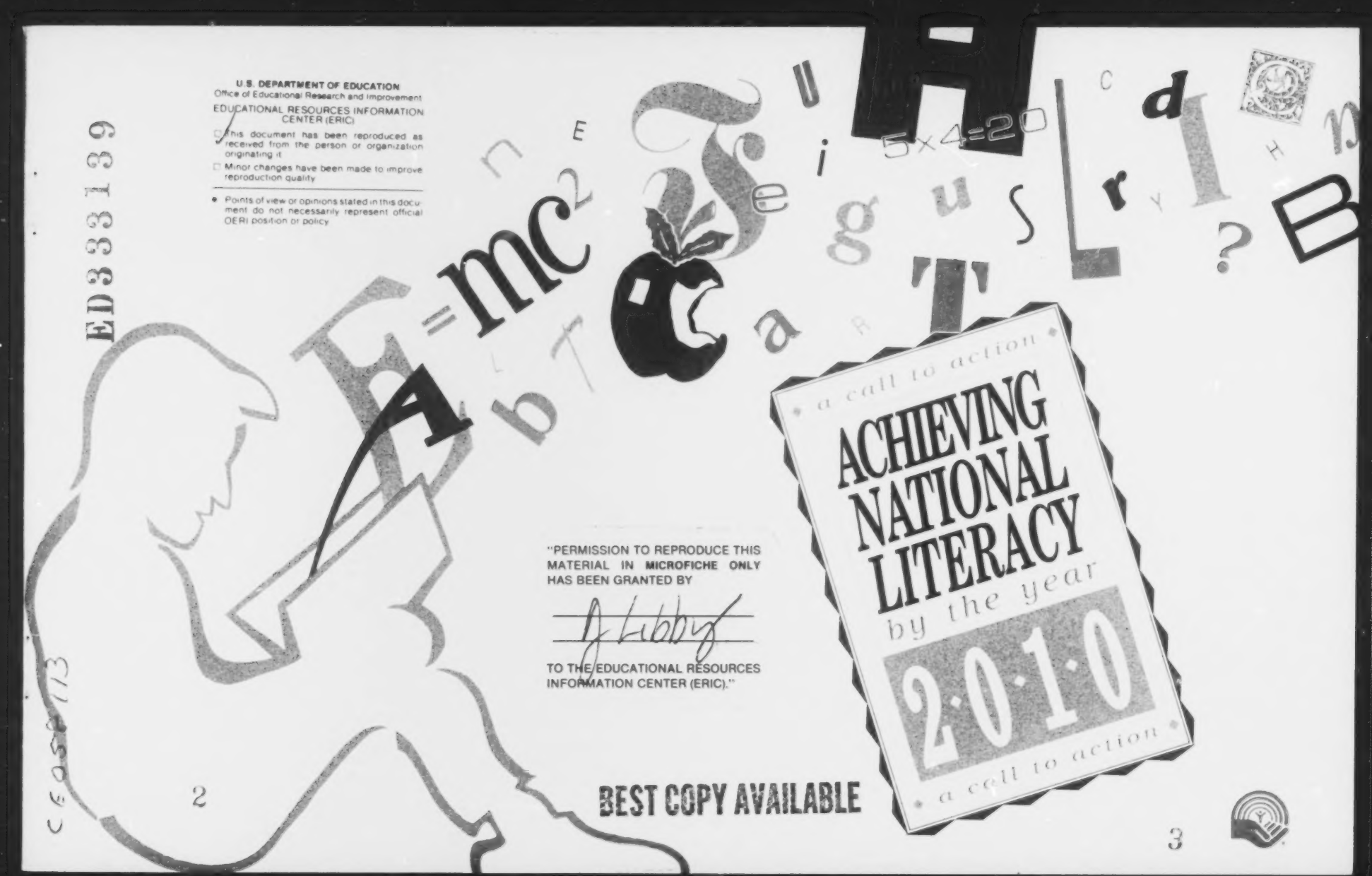

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a call to action

ACHIEVING NATIONAL LITERACY by the year 2·0·1·0

a call to action

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T·H·E C·O·M·M·I·T·T·E·E

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F·O·R·E·W·O·R·D

The following pages contain a bold Call to Action developed by the National Committee on Education and Literacy, which was convened by United Way of America. This Call to Action asks United Way—and the nation—to make the achievement of literacy a top national priority. Today, an astounding 27 million Americans lack the basic skills they need to perform seemingly simple, everyday tasks, such as reading a newspaper or filling out a job application. Cut off by their inability to communicate effectively, these people lose hope of living self-sufficient lives: they cannot find jobs, solve problems, or even vote.

The situation, as it stands today, is totally unacceptable. Americans—*all* Americans—must have the ability to read, write, and comprehend fully. Equally important is the need to prevent our children and youth from increasing the ranks of illiteracy.

Literacy groups and many schools across the nation have been working diligently—and effectively —to teach basic skills to thousands of Americans. But as valiant as their efforts are, they need additional resources— the types of resources and organization that United Way can marshal.

United Way is a unique network of 1,400 member organizations across America, with tremendous sources of volunteers and strong relationships with the public and private sectors. That fact, combined with a long history of successful community problem-solving efforts, puts United Way in an excellent position to enhance and supplement current education and literacy efforts. The Call to Action includes strategies and objectives United Way and other organizations can use to reach our ultimate goal: *achieving literacy by the year 2010.* The following pages contain specific action steps that United Way of America will take toward that goal.

The work accomplished by this distinguished committee, chaired by Charles D. Peebler, Jr., chief executive officer of Bozell, is outstanding.

William Aramony
President
United Way of America

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T·H·E C·H·A·L·L·E·N·G·E

America is in trouble. It is in trouble because times have changed and, as a nation, we have failed to keep up with the changes. Today's world and today's economy are complex. Both call for a literate, well-educated citizenry and work force. And when it comes to achieving self-sufficiency— and self-respect —literacy is a key.

Simply defined, literacy is the ability to read, write, and understand printed information; but a broad view of literacy encompasses far more. A literate person has the skills needed to effectively communicate, and to think through and solve problems. Literacy is one vehicle by which individuals can gain control of their own lives and develop their own potential.

With each passing year, the need for literacy becomes more evident. Today, the average new job requires 13.5 years of education. Thus, people who are not literate have difficulty coping, let alone competing, in today's world.

ACHIEVING LITERACY: THE TIME IS NOW

Once the most well-educated nation on earth, the United States now must acknowledge that, in terms of literacy, it no longer measures up.

These bleak statistics tell the story:

- *One-fourth of American students drop out of school before graduation*; in inner cities, the high school drop-out rate is over 50 percent.
- *At least 27 million Americans are functionally illiterate;* another 35 million to 45 million Americans are only marginally literate.
- *Only 27 percent of all new jobs fall into low skill categories, compared to 40 percent of jobs prior to 1990.* In short, as fewer new workers enter the labor force, each individual is becoming increasingly vital.
- *Seven out of ten high school students cannot write an effective letter* seeking employment or information.

The ramifications of illiteracy are many. In economic terms, widespread illiteracy will cause the United States to lose its competitive edge, particularly at a time when the nation's labor pool is shrinking rapidly. In political terms, an illiterate population cannot fully comprehend the severity of the many problems facing our communities and the nation-at-large. And if this population cannot grasp the problems, it cannot solve them.

Perhaps an even more insidious result of illiteracy can be viewed in civic terms. People who lack basic skills cannot fully participate in, or contribute to, a democratic society. Unable to comprehend the complexities of community life, they are often left out, don't vote, and fail to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

ILLITERACY: EVERYONE'S CONCERN

If illiteracy affected only a small portion of our population, it would be easy to dismiss as a relatively harmless problem—at least from a national perspective. But, as the statistics indicate, those who are functionally or marginally illiterate make up a significant portion of our population. For these individuals, illiteracy represents a major barrier to self-sufficiency—limiting their options in family, work, and society. Moreover, illiteracy affects a complex web of social issues, ranging from unemployment and juvenile delinquency to teen pregnancy and welfare dependency.

In a real sense, illiteracy threatens the very health of our nation's economy and society. For this reason, illiteracy is *everyone*'s problem—and resolving that

problem will require the cooperation, creativity, collaboration, and resources of every segment of American society.

Finding ways to resolve the illiteracy issue will not be easy, because there is no single cause for individuals' failing to learn to read, write, and reason.

A number of factors contribute to the rise of illiteracy in our society: poverty, inequities in the nation's education system, fragmentation of services to disadvantaged families and individuals, and the rising number of people for whom English is a second language. Ironically, at the same time that the root causes of illiteracy are flourishing, our society's literacy demands are *rising*.

A BOLD CALL TO ACTION

To solve our nation's illiteracy problem, each of us must make the pursuit of literacy a top priority at every level —locally, statewide, regionally, and nationally. Moreover, we must approach the problem in a comprehensive way, one that makes the best use of *all* our resources.

That's why United Way of America has issued this Call to Action. Through a network of 1,400 member United Way organizations, the United Way system touches virtually every U.S. community—serving as a convener, coalition builder, and funder of responses to our communities' most pressing needs. This "Call to Action" is a summons not only for United Way, but also for public and private organizations, institutions, and businesses to bring dynamic, powerful resources to the fight against illiteracy.

Because of the compelling and urgent needs of both our nation and its people—and particularly those people held back by illiteracy—United Way of America is aggressively pursuing a goal of ensuring that the systems are in place *to solve the nation's basic skills problem by the year 2010.* To that end, United Way of America convened the National Committee on Education and Literacy (NCEL) in January 1989. This top policy-level committee—representing business, public officials, education, literacy organizations, organized labor, the professions, and the community-at-large—has developed this comprehensive plan to prevent, as well as remediate, illiteracy.

This Call to Action outlines the NCEL's plan —a set of strategies, objectives, and actions based on United Way's community problem-solving approach. At the heart of the Call to Action is a set of three national strategies to achieve full literacy. These strategies provide a role for every institution, public or private, and every organization concerned with literacy. Indeed, the NCEL and United Way of America encourage their widespread application.

The three strategies are:

I. *Create and sustain a national policy that makes literacy a national priority.*

II. *Expand and ensure access to, and coordination of, available literacy education resources; and strengthen the capacity of the nation's literacy and education systems.*

III. *Support, encourage, and expand a community or collaborative approach to achieving literacy.*

The NCEL has developed, under these strategies, national objectives designed to help achieve literacy by the year 2010. In addition, it has developed a plan of action for United Way of America.

As the national "community table" on education and literacy, the NCEL will continue over the next two years its work with representatives from all key sectors to ensure that these and other literacy-related strategies are implemented.

The NCEL lends its endorsement and support to the national education goals which President Bush and the nation's governors have set forth. *(See accompanying description.)* We believe that this Call to Action is a furtherance of these goals.

NATIONAL EDUCATION GOALS

President Bush and the nation's governors have set six ambitious goals for education to ensure that the United States remains competitive in the world marketplace.

Achieving the national goals for education is not solely the responsibility of educators. All Americans have a stake. And the scope of the national education goals requires that everyone play a role.

BY THE YEAR 2000:

Goal 1: All children in America will start school ready to learn.

Goal 2: The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent.

Goal 3: American students will leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography.

Goal 4: American students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.

Goal 5: Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Goal 6: Every school in America will be free of drugs or violence, and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.

In the spirit of cooperation that has made our nation great, United Way of America calls on all Americans to join in achieving literacy by the year 2010. In issuing this challenge, United Way of America will continue its priority to help, support, and strengthen education and literacy efforts in communities throughout our nation.

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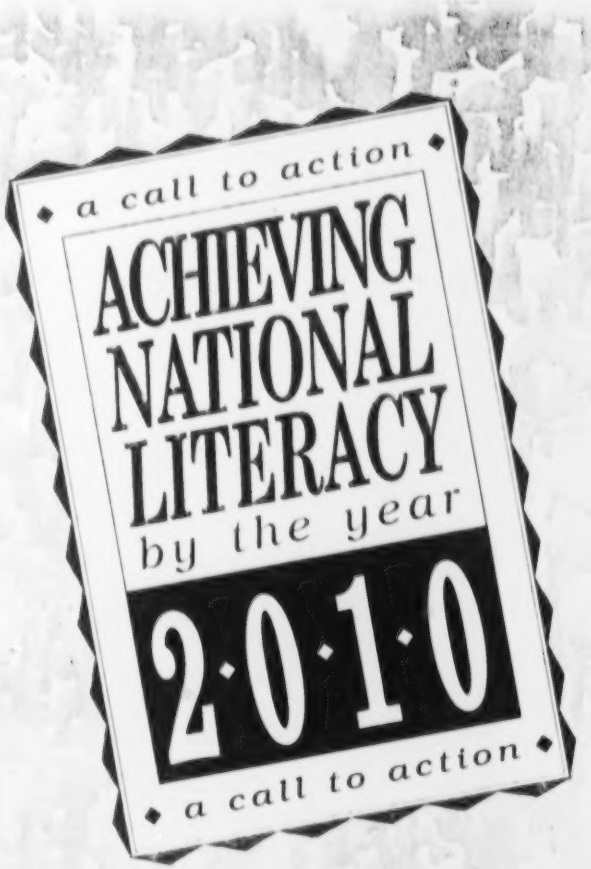

Two things are clear about America's efforts to overcome illiteracy. First, many steps have been taken and many programs are in place to address this issue. But what is also clear is that the obstacles that still remain are formidable and require bold new steps if we are to reach a goal of ensuring that all Americans are literate. The obstacles raise fundamental questions about what approaches to consider and what actions to take. As members of the National Committee on Education and Literacy (NCEL) and as leaders in business, education, government, organized labor, literacy, and other sectors concerned about the current and future crisis of illiteracy, it is our belief that in order to achieve literacy, the bold strategies and goals outlined in this Call to Action must be pursued. We and United Way of America (UWA) will take a leadership role. We support and commend those many groups concerned about and involved in literacy.

National Committee on Education and Literacy
Charles D. Peebler, Jr., Chair

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STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING LITERACY

1. Press for leadership at all levels to create and sustain a national priority to promote literacy that is responsive to the community's needs.

- Call for Presidential leadership which sets adult literacy and education as a national priority, ensuring that the federal government plays a significant role in carrying out national education goals.
- Call for the nation's governors to develop and maintain national education goals, and support them in developing ways to attain those goals within their respective states.
- Ensure that federal, state, and local governments collaborate in setting policy and establishing funding for literacy, welfare reform, and job training.
- Call for working alliances among key business, education, and legislative groups, such as the National Alliance of Business, National Governors' Association, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the Business Roundtable, and organizations and individuals representing education, adult education, literacy, and other related systems, such as United Way of America.
- Hold Congress accountable for passing comprehensive literacy legislation that provides adequate funding for literacy education and concomitant support services (such as transportation and child care), and that includes a means of coordinating literacy efforts.
- Ensure that citizens have a role in determining national education goals and formulating national literacy policy.
- Hold Congress and the President accountable to the principle that quality education is the right of all our nation's children.

2. Advocate for comprehensive federal, state, and local strategies to ensure that the United States achieves a fully literate population.

- Ensure that all levels of government pass comprehensive literacy legislation and appropriate funds accordingly.

3. Advocate for a restructuring of our educational system to achieve improved student performance and quality education for all children.

- Identify appropriate advocates who can lead educational restructuring and support their efforts.

- Support proven, successful methods for restructuring an education system. Such methods should include the encouragement of school-based management; greater business/community involvement in schools, including after-school educational programs; and greater opportunities for the professional development and training of teachers and administrators.

4. Reduce the wide economic disparity between the "haves" and "have-nots."

- Work to eliminate inequities in the educational system.
- Encourage public and private groups, as well as individuals, to direct more funds toward basic human needs, such as education, housing, nutrition programs, and community development efforts.
- Explore the connections between literacy and social issues, such as poverty, homelessness, racism, and family relationships. Address the conditions that perpetuate illiteracy.

5. Promote a society-wide mandate for literacy that is upheld in our institutions, families, and workplaces. That mandate should address the conditions leading to illiteracy.

- Support and increase participant involvement in promoting a society-wide mandate for literacy.
- Call for media, especially the broadcast media, to support an ethic for reading.
- Persuade government, business, and community leaders to establish literacy as a top-priority social issue by providing needed collaboration and resources.
- Assist business and organized labor in setting literacy as a priority and substantially increasing the skills of our work force.
- Increase the stature, leadership, and resources of the nation's literacy systems.
- Remove the stigma from illiteracy, thereby enabling more people to step forward to receive literacy training.

6. Press for the removal of the barriers to literacy by implementing broad-based efforts that identify and accommodate the "hardest to reach" and the "hardest to teach."

- Train literacy volunteers to be sensitive to the needs and varying backgrounds of literacy students.
- Empower representatives of "hard-to-reach" communities to inform and educate traditional literacy program staff and leaders about effective ways to serve the "hard to reach."

Dropout rates are higher among minorities than non-minorities. This situation was particularly acute in some high schools in San Antonio, Texas, where a Hispanic enrollment rate of 98 percent was coupled with a 50 percent dropout rate. But a program called "Communities in Schools," funded by United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County, has made a substantial difference in the dropout rate. In the five years of the program, 95 percent of participating students have stayed in school or have graduated. The program has expanded from one school to six — including middle and elementary schools — and within three years, the program will operate in 50 schools.

- Put in place a support system that addresses the full range of an individual's and a community's needs. Such a system should integrate all needed services and be easily accessible.
- Support development and expansion of high school services for "at-risk" youth, as well as alternative educational services for youth no longer in school.

II. *Expand and Ensure Access to, and Coordination of, Available Literacy Education Resources; and Strengthen the Capacity of the Nation's Literacy and Education Systems.*

1. Coordinate and integrate existing education and social-service systems so they can work together to meet human-service needs in a more effective and comprehensive way.

- Develop and implement strategies that reward cooperation and integration of resources and services.
- Provide supportive human services along with educational services. Such supportive services might include prenatal care; early childhood development programs; family literacy programs; services to at-risk youth; and health, counseling, and nutrition services.

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2. *Assure adequate funding for the literacy and adult education systems, including funds for direct education, concomitant support services, and coordination of effort.*

- Address the interrelationship of federal, state, and local funds, and encourage cooperative funding at these three levels.
- Expand resources for literacy from both the private and public sectors to ensure funding for core operation, as well as capacity building for a diverse delivery system which includes public, volunteer, nonprofit, and community-based organizations.

3. *Increase the capacity of adult literacy education systems.*

- Increase the number of effective, full-time, paid professionals in the adult education field; and ensure that they receive adequate pay and benefits, as well as support for their professional development.
- Increase the number of effective, well-trained literacy volunteers.

- Develop the leadership capabilities of adult literacy students so they can help find ways to improve all aspects of literacy education.
- Increase the ability of literacy organizations to develop and implement work-force literacy programs.
- Promote the development and expansion of all literacy programs, especially those geared to the work force and those offered through public libraries and through community-based organizations.
- Develop and promote more effective practices for teaching literacy by adopting the latest advances in training and technology.
- Identify, develop, and promote diverse and effective methods of assessing and meeting the needs of literacy students. Provide the resources needed to support those methods.
- Develop ways to expand, enhance, and coordinate all national, state, and local training mechanisms.
- Call for and support the establishment of an independent National Center for Literacy. The Center should serve as an important focal point for all literacy work.

4. Promote diversity in learning environments so more people can have access to literacy training.

- Fund and replicate effective alternative education programs.
- Encourage communities to develop literacy programs that meet local needs.
- Encourage communities to develop plans for keeping citizens involved in education programs throughout their lives.
- Restructure schools into community learning centers which address the needs of youth and adults alike.

III. *Support, Encourage, and Expand a Community or Collaborative Approach to Achieving Literacy.*

1. Bring together a wide spectrum of community leaders to develop a comprehenstve plan for effectively using resources, expertise, and services to meet the needs of people seeking to be literate.

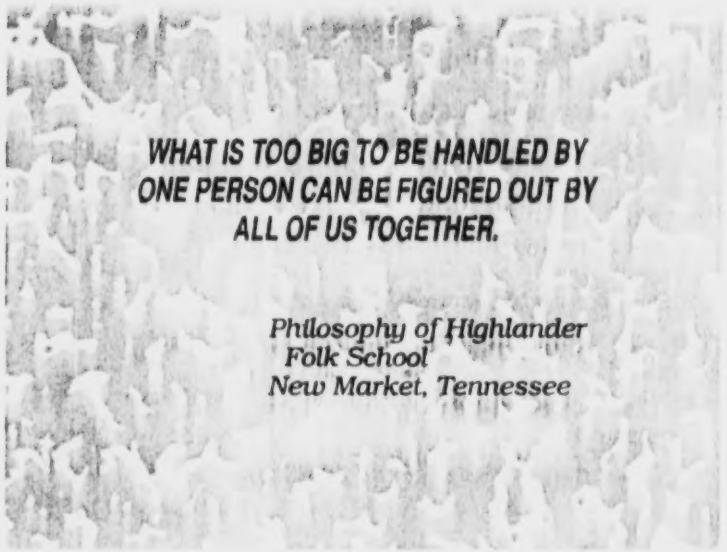
- Promote development of youth and adult learners to enable their leadership in all aspects of literacy education.
- Support, promote, and where necessary develop community collaborative efforts.
- Call for public and private funding that supports community collaboration/coalition.
- Establish easy access to information about models of effective community collaboration and encourage the replication of such programs.
- Encourage all sectors of society to get involved in literacy efforts.

2. Ensure that every community has comprehensive, diverse, effective, and well-coordinated education/literacy and social-service systems that reflect the client's perspective and that meet the needs of the whole person and family.

- Ensure that business, educators, nonprofit providers, organized labor, and elected officials forge a consensus to work together effectively to restructure the education system in order to eliminate illiteracy.
- Assist in the coordination of the voluntary sector, social-service programs, and government agencies to ensure that individuals in need of comprehensive services receive and have access to those services.

3. Develop common agreement among the literacy community about the best ways to evaluate literacy efforts and to measure the success of those efforts.

- Bring together all members of the community who have a stake in literacy and help them reach a consensus on how best to measure the success of local literacy efforts. Help them recognize that there are diverse ways to measure success.
- Disseminate information about outstanding models for assessing the success of literacy efforts.


WHAT IS TOO BIG TO BE HANDLED BY
ONE PERSON CAN BE FIGURED OUT BY
ALL OF US TOGETHER.
Philosophy of Highlander
Folk School
New Market, Tennessee

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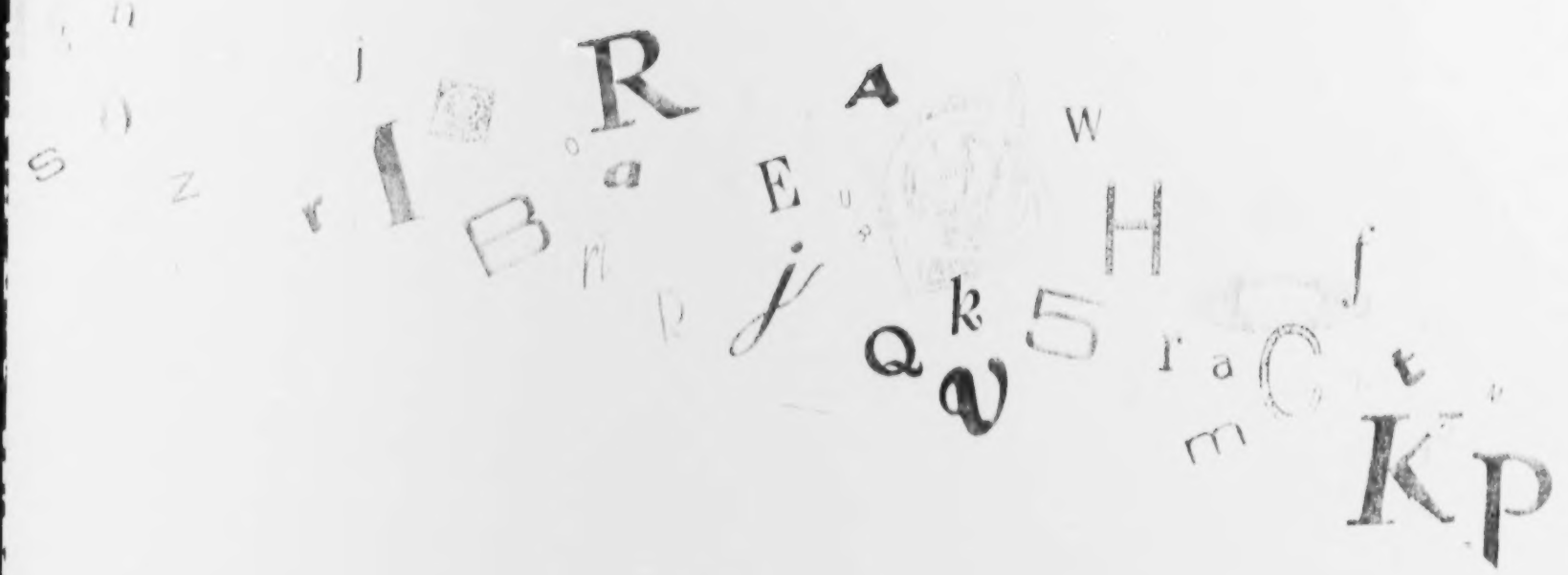

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I. *Create and Sustain a National Policy That Makes Literacy a National Priority.*

SHORT TERM *(1 - 3 years)*

By 1993:

United Way of America (UWA) will ensure that until funding and legislation are secure, literacy will remain one of UWA's top public affairs agenda items.

UWA will announce to United Way communities and to its National Corporate Leadership (NCL) participants its position on education and literacy and how it intends to carry out leadership strategy one.

UWA will partner with the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to develop pilot projects in select cities aimed at family and/or worker literacy and basic skills.

UWA will work with the media (print, broadcast, and film) to develop and sustain a plan for promoting an ethic for reading.

UWA will encourage the Points of Light Foundation to make education and literacy a top priority for volunteer involvement.

UWA, in serving as a role model for other organizations, will afford its employees a certain amount of released time to volunteer as literacy tutors or as mentors to at-risk children/youth.

UWA will provide training to United Ways on cultural diversity so they can work more effectively with minority agencies and individuals. UWA also will make such training available to providers of literacy services.

UWA will encourage United Ways to work with their local school systems and communities to:

- Increase parental involvement in schools by at least 25 percent.
- Provide trained and caring volunteers or parents for at-risk children/youth in school.
- Reduce the number of youth who drop out of school each year.

In a little more than two years, the number of United Ways supporting literacy in their communities has increased by 300 percent — from fewer than 100 in 1988 to over 400 United Ways in 1990.

UWA will call for an increase in public and private funding to literacy programs.

UWA will create a booklet outlining what business can do to support literacy efforts. UWA will make the booklet available to United Ways for widespread distribution.

UWA will seek to increase to 700 the number of United Ways involved in programs to achieve literacy, as well as programs to *prevent illiteracy*.

UWA will develop a venture grant program to promote an education support initiative. This initiative will provide a comprehensive array of social services to at-risk youth within the school environment.

UWA will select at least six cities to initiate the "Success by 6" project, which focuses on early childhood development and helps ensure that every child enters school prepared to learn.

UWA will use its Young Leaders Conference to identify strategies for making education acceptable to young people and will involve young leaders in implementing identified strategies.

United Way of Minneapolis Area in Minneapolis, Minnesota, has made early childhood development a priority. Its pioneering "Success by 6" program identifies and responds to the deficits in developmental skills of disadvantaged children from infancy through preschool. "Success by 6" calls for total community involvement and commitment; leaders from business, government, and other local human-service organizations are playing major roles in designing and carrying out "Success by 6" strategies.

LONG TERM

By 2010:

UWA's public affairs agenda will call for full funding of Headstart to ensure that, by 1996, every child eligible for Headstart can attend a program.

UWA will motivate and enable local United Ways to support literacy efforts. UWA will accomplish this by:

- Developing appropriate resource materials.
- Providing training and technical assistance.
- Keeping the literacy issue present and alive.
- Helping keep the public focused long term on the issue of literacy.

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UWA will provide staff and leadership development training for literacy professionals through UWA's National Academy for Voluntarism, through its Management Assistance Program, and by encouraging participation in Leadership Tomorrow training programs.

UWA will encourage media to use their resources to help remove the stigma from illiteracy.

UWA will identify national minority agencies that have a focus on literacy and develop partnerships on the national and local levels.

UWA will encourage community leaders to work together to find effective methods for serving the "hardest to reach" and "hardest to teach." To that end, UWA will identify and replicate successful community models.

UWA will encourage a national consensus that every child, by the fourth grade, should be able to read with comprehension, write with clarity, and compute with accuracy.

UWA will provide annual opportunities for national agencies involved in literacy and education to meet to determine shared agendas and work cooperatively.

UWA will promote citizen participation in achieving literacy. It will encourage United Ways to work in conjunction with their mayors to convene town-hall-type meetings and community roundtables on the issue of achieving literacy.

UWA will form a coalition with the music and entertainment industries and related unions to promote education to youth.

II. *Expand and Ensure Access to, and Coordination of, Available Literacy Education Resources; and Strengthen the Capacity of the Nation's Literacy and Education Systems.*

SHORT TERM *(1 - 3 YEARS)*

By 1993:

UWA will provide awareness training and technical assistance to information and referral (I&R) services, to ensure that those services can help people expressing interest in literacy and education.

UWA will challenge business leadership to volunteer, fund, and participate in literacy and education efforts. For example, UWA will encourage businesses to give employees released time to tutor, mentor, and/or implement workplace literacy programs for employees.

More than 7,000 adults will learn to read over the next two years at work sites, in classrooms, in store-front agencies, and at a shopping mall as a result of the United Parcel Service/UWA Literacy Challenge Grants, which provided $100,000 grants to six communities.

UWA will widely disseminate the curricula developed under the United Parcel Service (UPS)/UWA Literacy Challenge Grant. These curricula incorporate computer technology and critical-thinking skills into literacy instruction.

UWA will develop a new venture grant program to build the capacity of education and literacy systems.

UWA will work closely with Gifts In Kind America to identify education and literacy programs that could benefit from donations of in-kind gifts, as well as identify the types of in-kind gifts those programs need.

UWA will work to further the understanding of learning disabilities and increase effective, low-cost services to the learning-disabled adult.

LONG TERM

By 2010:

UWA will encourage programs for parental involvement with schools and with the education of their children.

UWA will support efforts to restructure our educational system. UWA also will support the development of curricula that encourage student responsibility and provide incentives for all students to achieve academic success.

UWA will support an increase in public funding for literacy and education, including funding for creative, nontraditional efforts.

UWA will encourage the continuation and expansion of organized labor's involvement in education and literacy, particularly adult literacy.

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III. Support, Encourage, and Expand a Community or Collaborative Approach to Achieving Literacy.

SHORT TERM

By 1993:

UWA will disseminate this Call to Action to appropriate business groups, national associations, forums, and organizations, and will encourage their involvement in achieving literacy.

UWA will create a national award program to recognize individuals and organizations that are truly making a difference in the literacy effort.

UWA will develop a tool which communities can use to assess their local literacy needs, identify resources currently available, and identify any gaps in services.

UWA will encourage United Ways to continue working with existing organizations to assess the community's literacy need and to help fill gaps and provide training, funding, and technical assistance. UWA will continue to help United Ways as they collaborate with both public and private groups.

UWA will work with all who have a stake in the literacy effort to develop common definitions and criteria for achieving success in literacy. UWA will also promote systems of accountability for literacy programs.

UWA will support efforts to ensure that effective central communications vehicles exist to answer questions posed by persons wanting to learn to read, people interested in volunteering, or groups and individuals wanting to help fund literacy efforts.

UWA will hold national forums, for local United Ways and other funding organizations, on funding strategies for literacy programs.

LONG TERM

By 2010:

UWA will encourage community collaboration to achieve literacy. It will do this by training community leaders to bring diverse segments of the community together to effectively address the literacy issue. UWA will also offer examples of successful collaborative efforts, including nontraditional programs, as well as programs that draw on the strengths and achievements of people who have recently learned to read.

UWA will continue to participate in national coalitions and organizations committed to education and literacy.

UWA will continue to provide a focus on education and literacy at its national and regional staff and volunteer conferences.

UWA will continue to support the National Committee on Education and Literacy to serve as a force for education and literacy within UWA and in the national community.

UWA will increase the visibility of the education and literacy issues through UWA's own print and audiovisual materials, and through its information and referral system.

UWA will develop and support leadership training for adults who have recently learned to read.

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